(a) whether the Government propose to remove import curbs on foreign farm goods within a few years being a signatory to the World Trade Organisation;

(b) if so, the main items of farm goods;

(c) whether any plan has bee mooted out to protect the interests of the Indian farmers; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (DR. BOLLA BULLI RAMAIAH) : (a) to (b) Pursuant to the meeting of the Committee on Balance of Payments Restrictions of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) held on 20–21 January, 1997, India presented to the WTO on 19 May, 1997 a plan for the elimination of all residual quantitative restrictions on imports, including those on agricultural products maintained for balance of payments purposes to the WTO on 19 May 1997. This plan was considered at the resumed consultations with India of the WTO Committee on Balance of Payments Restrictions on 10–11 June, 1997 and on 30 June —1 July, 1997, when noting the divergence of opinion among WTO members on the Plan, it was agreed to conclude the consultations.

Subsequently, six WTO Members, namely Australia, Canada, the European Communities, New Zealand, Switzerland and the United States of America, requested consultations with India under Article XXII of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) 1994 and the Understanding on Rules and Procedures Governing the Settlement of Disputes. Pursuant to these consultations agreement has been reached with Canada, the EC and Switzerland in respect of the time-schedules for the elimination of residual quantitative restrictions on imports maintained for balance of payment purposes. Negotiations towards a mutually satisfactory solution with Australia and New Zealand are in an advanced stage. At the request of the USA a panel has been constituted on 18 November, 1997 to examine the US allegation that the continued maintenance of quantitative restrictions on imports by India is inconsistent with India's obligations under the WTO Agreement.

(c) to (d) The quantitative restrictions on imports are proposed to be eliminated in a phased manner so that the interests of the farmers in India are protected to the maximum extent. Simultaneously efforts are being made to improve productivity of Indian agriculture and to enhance overall competitiveness. Safeguard measures to protect domestic production, such as protection through tariffs, anti-dumping measures, countervailing measures to offset the effect of unjustifiable subsidies and safeguard measures to prevent damage to domestic production through surge in imports, are proposed to be utilised effectively.

[Translation]

Export of Ornaments

512. SHRI SOHANVEER SINGH :
DR. RAMVILAS VEDANTI :

Will the Minister of COMMERCE be please to state:

(a) whether India has exported gold ornaments in huge quantity to the foreign countries during the last three years;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the foreign exchange earned by the country during the said period; and

(d) the value of orders for export of gold ornaments received during 1997–98?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (DR. BOLLA BULLI RAMAIAH) : (a) to (c): There has been substantial growth in export of gold jewellery (including studded jewellery) from India over the last three years.

The foreign exchange earned by exports of gold jewellery during the last three years and the growth in this sector are as follow:—

(Value US $ Million)

Year	Value	Growth(%)
1994–95	421.20	36.49
1995–96	480.40	14.06
1996–97 (Provisional)	511.80	6.54

(Source : DGCIS)

(d) Export orders are received directly by individual exporters all over India and, therefore, it is not possible to know the exact figures unless exported. However, it is expected that the export growth trend will continue during 1997–98.

Customs Duty on Edible Oil

513. SHRI MAHESH KANODIA :
SHRI PANKAJ CHOWDHARY :

Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have recently made heavy reduction in the customs duty on the import of edible oils;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the Government are aware of the adverse impact of this heavy reduction on domestic food industry; and

(d) if so, the concrete action taken by the Government to provide protection to domestic edible oil industry?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI SATPAL MAHARAJ) : (a) and (b) No reduction in customs duty on edible oils has been made after the presentation of the budget for the year 1997–98.

(c) and (d) The present rates of customs duty applicable to edible oils have been prescribed taking into account all relevant factors, including the interests of the domestic industry, with a view to ensure the availability of edible oils to the consumer at reasonable prices.

[English]

NTC Losses

514. SHRI N. RAMAKRISHNA REDDY : Will the Minister of TEXTILES be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government propose to abolish subsidiary offices of NTC to contain loss;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the justification therefor?

THE MINISTER OF TEXTILES (SHRI R.L. JALAPPA): (a) There is at present no proposal to abolish any of the subsidiary corporations of the National Textile Corporation.

(b) and (c) Do not arise.

Posts Lying Vacant in Banks/LIC

515. SHRI K.D. SULTANPURI : Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state.

(a) the state-wise number of posts reserved for Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes are lying vacant in Banks and Life Insurance Corporation;

(b) the action being taken to fill up these posts during the current financial year; and

(c) the details thereof, State-wise?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI SATPAL MAHARAJ) : (a) to (c) The information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

Empowerment of Women

516. SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : Will the Minister of LAW AND JUSTICE be pleased be state:

(a) whether in the light of the discussions during the debates in both the Houses of Parliament on the occasion of 50th Anniversary of Independence, the Government have taken or propose to take any effective steps for empowerment of women including provision of due representation in legislative bodies as committed by various political parties.

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the progress so far made in regard thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI RAMAKANT D. KHALAP) : (a) to (c) The Constitution (Eighty-first Amendment) Bill, 1996 which seeks to reserve one-third of the total number of seats in the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies of every State for women has already been introduced by the Government in the Lok Sabha on 12.9.96. The bill was referred to a Joint Committee of both Houses of Parliament and the Committee presented its report on 9.12.1996. Government has since accepted all the recommendations made by the Joint Committee.

Income Tax Arrears

517. SHRI R.L.P. VERMA :
DR. ARVIND SHARMA :
SHRI MANIBHAI RAMJIBHAI CHAUDHARI :

Will the Minister of FINANCE pleased to state:

(a) the total amount of Income Tax arrears outstanding upto June, 1997 alongwith year-wise break up for the last five years;

(b) the details of defaulters who owe arrears amounting to ten lakhs or more;

(c) whether these defaulters have been prosecuted;

(d) if so the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor; and

(e) the efforts made to recover the arrears and the amount of arrears recovered so far?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI SATPAL MAHARAJ) : (a) The total outstanding demand of Corporation tax and income-tax for the last five years are as under:—

Fin. Years	Total Outstanding Demand (Rs. in crores)
1992–93	9211
1993–94	10780
1994–95	22699
1995–96	28970
1996–97 (Prov.)	33979
1997–98 (Upto June, 97)	33320